

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! In this edition I'll be discussing the subject of cost, but not of the monetary variety.

I would encourage you to go to <https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info> as I continue to update the site. I have links to several specific features below. Let me know what you think, whether you have any suggestions, or any requests.

As always, I'm extending an invitation for submissions to be published in The Gospel Notes Newsletter (TGNN). Additionally, if you have a subject or a question that you would like to have covered in a future edition of TGNN, feel free to send me a note and I'll do my best to address it.

The primary criteria for inclusion of articles are these:

1. It should be oriented towards the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It should use the scriptures as a source of information.
3. It should include references for any quoted 3rd party sources.
4. It should not be political.

If you have a testimony to share, please send that to me and let me know if you would like it to be included in a future edition of the newsletter. Please keep in mind the four criteria listed above where applicable.

You can view previous editions of The Gospel Notes Newsletter (TGNN) in PDF (Portable Document Format) at <https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info/TheGospelNotesNewsletter>

Or you can access other educational/informational/inspirational resources at <https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info/Resources>

You can find the current preaching schedule for the Springfield, Missouri Restoration Branch at https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info/Resources/Service_Schedule.php

If you do not wish to receive the newsletter, please let me know. All responses to me will be treated confidentially unless you tell me otherwise.

Luke 14 (Inspired Version)

28 Wherefore, settle this in your hearts, that ye will do the things which I shall teach and command you.

29 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he have money to finish his work?

30 Lest, unhappily, after he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish his work, all who behold begin to mock him,

31 Saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish. And this he said, signifying there should not any man follow him unless he was able to continue, saying,

32 Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him who cometh against him with twenty thousand;
33 Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassy and desireth conditions of peace.

34 So likewise, whosoever of you forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

We see the wisdom in this passage being ignored all around us. The first part of this talks about something that we all deal with every day to some extent, but it presents a more spiritual element than most people seem to accept.

Admittedly, most of us don't build towers these days (though there are some whom I will mention), but the principle remains the same regardless of what you embark upon. Jesus frequently uses the common-person concepts to reveal the higher-level doctrine, whether it is a guy who plows a field, or someone that finds treasure and buys up the property that has it. In this example Jesus shows that there are steps involved in making a big decision, steps that if ignored lead to shame and embarrassment on the one hand, or dire consequences on the other hand.

We are surrounded by people that make big claims about things they can do. In Saudi Arabia and Dubai there is a construction boom taking place. They think big, and they glory in the wonders they can create by their wealth. One of the crown princes of Saudi Arabia has engaged in this kind of showmanship on a whole new level in a project called "The Line," but in truth it is just one of *many* such projects currently in the works.

The original vision of "The Line" project is to create parallel buildings that are 500 meters (1640 feet) tall – skyscrapers in their own right - and 170 *kilometers* (106 *miles*) long – something never done before, and a total width of 200 meters (656 feet). (see <https://www.neom.com/en-us/regions/theline>). The promise is made that it would be a new kind of city ("A revolution in civilization" as indicated on the home page), one in which there is a virtual utopia of beauty, high technology, elegance and efficiency. And it is *expensive*. Originally estimated at around 200 *Billion* dollars (not Million), most experts will say that is far, far too low of a figure to represent any kind of reality, suggesting instead that such a structure would realistically cost many *Trillions* of dollars to complete.

Sheiks and princes in these countries are known for making grandiose claims and expending many millions of dollars on extravagant projects, whether it is the tallest buildings in the world, the fanciest restaurants, or having the most opulent palaces or the most expensive cars in the world. They are demonstrating their wealth which has come from the petroleum industry over the course of the last half of a century.

It won't last.

Already the cracks are showing. The land requirements alone for "The Line" have resulted in the execution of those that didn't want to move out of the way, and the landscape is an unforgiving place to build a structure in the first place. Whether it is the sand dunes, the heat, lack of water, or the shortage of labor, equipment, and materials, they are already years behind schedule. The plan of having several tens or even hundreds of thousands of people living in the first parts of the place

by 2030 is a far cry from ever being possible. They haven't even finished enough excavation to lay a foundation.

In the leading scripture Jesus was not just talking about building buildings, but the exercise of wisdom. It should be understood that Jesus wasn't saying, "Let's just throw some numbers out there and wish upon a star before we embark upon this task," but to be reasonable, practical and considerate of the requirements and consequences of doing so, and of whether the outcome is something you are willing to make sacrifices for to accomplish.

This passage of scripture in Luke isn't intended to be an instruction manual for how to balance your books or make economic estimates, but to ask yourself the hard questions about your spiritual life – and find answers - before you jump into it.

The latter part of the passage makes this clear.

"...So likewise, whosoever of you forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple...."

The question is perhaps less about whether the reward is worth the effort, but whether the reward is something you are willing to make sacrifices to receive. By all measures the reward for keeping the commandments, obeying the Gospel and following Jesus is eternal life, and for that we have great reason to believe the reward is well worth it. But are you willing to give up things in this life to make that reward an assured outcome?

Have you counted the cost of being a disciple of Jesus Christ?

We read about the steps for becoming a disciple of Christ – belief, faith, repentance, baptisms, etc., and these steps are just the beginning, not the end. Individually these things are not hard to embark upon or to accomplish. The act of Baptism by water takes just a minute, and the laying on of hands for bestowing the Holy Ghost is also something that takes just a minute or two. But that is only the start. There is a responsibility that is associated with these decisions, and that responsibility is a life-long pursuit.

With this talk of responsibility and making long-term decisions, it is not intended in any way to dissuade anyone from accepting this invitation, but there are some who might take the decision to follow Jesus lightly, as lightly as if deciding whether to get groceries or fast food. It is an important decision to make, and the reward is worth it. But do you want it enough to be willing to change the way you live your life?

If you choose the Gospel way of life, you should pursue it with vigor and passion and not look back. You never have to be alone because God will be with you on this journey, and you don't have to wonder if there is a point to doing it. It is all worth it, the joy, the happiness, even the sorrow of this life, but through it all is the hope and the assurance that there is a greater life to live when all is said and done.

The people who seek after the glory of this world have not counted the cost. Every time we read about a new skyscraper that is being built to showcase someone's financial prowess, there must be an understanding that this is a passing thing. For example, the Chrysler Building in New York was the tallest building in the world, but it was surpassed by the Empire State Building.

(<https://cbwarburg.com/nabes/the-battle-to-be-the-worlds-tallest-building/>) in just eleven months.

The Empire State Building lost its title to the World Trade Center some 40 years later. Two years after that, the Sears/Willis Tower in Chicago, then 25 years later the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur 25, 6 years later the Taipei 101 tower, and 6 years after that the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, which is the current record-holder.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_world%27s_tallest_buildings)

The glory of this world will always be fleeting, but the Glory of God is eternal and cannot be surpassed. The tower built at Babel showcased the finest construction at the time, and the intent behind its construction was much the same as those that build today, but at what cost? They were driven away in shame.

We may not be building a tower like these that have been mentioned, but there is a tower that we build within ourselves, and the nature of that tower is the spirit that we foster and nurture. Whether it is a spirit of pride and haughtiness or one of humility and meekness, we will pay a price, but is the price we pay one that gives a reward that we can accept?

The price of salvation is free because Jesus paid for that, but it is not without responsibility.

Motivational speakers and popular evangelists are known for getting masses of people to be persuaded to do something, whether they preach a gospel of self-help or excitement, and they are able to convince many by their emotional appeal to the need people have for something that they can be happy about. Jesus did not preach a gospel of ease and shallow changes, but one of width and depth and height with labor.

Luke 16:18 Since that time, the kingdom of God is preached, and every man who seeketh truth presseth into it.

Jesus did not portray the life of a disciple as one filled with casual decisions or passive contemplation, but one of active and dedicated intent.

The heart of the “once saved, always saved” mantra repeated by millions of Christians may be well intended, but it is a misconstruction of the hope and promise of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It may convince millions of people that the way to eternal life is so simple that there is just one thing that you ever have to do, but the truth is that for something this important you need to work at it.

The counter-argument made by some is that we are not saved by our works, as attested to in Paul’s writings. That is indeed true, but the same people make the further statement that because we are not saved by our works that we don’t need to do any works at all, and idea that is flatly contradicted by the scriptures. This difference in idealism has led to a schism for hundreds of years among Christian churches, with some suggesting that the book of James in the bible is not a legitimate book of scripture. James advocated for faith with works working hand-in-hand, while they claim that Paul advocated for faith without works.

James 2

15 Yea, a man may say, I will show thee I have faith without works; but I say, Show me thy faith without works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.

21 Seest thou how works wrought with his faith and by works was faith made perfect?

23 Ye see then that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

Martin Luther, the founder of the Lutheran Church, publicly took issue with the book of James because of what he perceived as a contradiction between his philosophy – which followed the doctrine taught by Paul – and the doctrine that James advocated.

From <https://taylormarshall.com/2006/02/chasing-down-luther-quotes-about-james.html> we find the following:

“Therefore St James’ epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to these others, for it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it.”
(Luther’s Works 35, 362)

“The epistle of James gives us much trouble, for the Papists embrace it alone and leave out all the rest...Accordingly, if they will not admit my interpretations, then I shall make rubble also of it. I almost feel like throwing Jimmy into the stove, as the priest in Kalenberg did.”
(Luther’s Works 34, 317)

“We should throw the epistle of James out of this school [i.e. Wittenburg], for it doesn’t amount to much. It contains not a syllable about Christ. Not once does it mention Christ, except at the beginning. I maintain that some Jew wrote it who probably heard about Christian people but never encountered any. Since he heard that Christians place great weight on faith in Christ, he thought, ‘Wait a moment! I’ll oppose them and urge works alone.’ This he did.”
(Luther’s Works 54, 424)

There are some who, like Luther, proclaim that the Gospel message is more of an intellectual pursuit and not an active or full life pursuit. Luther was not prepared to accept the cost of accepting that his understanding was flawed, despite his other contributions to the reformation.

With no pun intended, the Gospel should be and always has been an immersive experience – one that you surround yourself with and in – one that you live by. Those disciples who turned away from Jesus because they felt other things were more necessary at the time than to follow Jesus and learn from him were only partially interested in the Gospel that he taught.

This is a difficult saying, to be sure.

We should not take Jesus’ words to mean that we shouldn’t take care of important things, but that we should understand the priority of those things. He spoke of helping the ox out of the pit and other such things – not because they had greater priority, but because doing good *is* the priority.

Luke 14:5 And spake unto them again, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day?

In other words, Jesus did not condemn people for doing necessary things, but for making unnecessary things a higher priority than those things that are necessary. He made these impassioned statements to illustrate the importance of recognizing priority over preference. We see this in many places – the parable of the good Samaritan (the Samaritan prioritized life over appearance), the parable of the wheat and the tares (prioritizing growth over judgment), the parable

of the prodigal son (prioritizing love over tradition and callousness), the parable of the ten virgins (prioritizing preparation over patience), and so on.

The promise and the caution are given hand-in-hand. Alma, Sr. extended the invitation this way:

Mosiah 9

39 And now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light,

40 Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn, yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times, and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life,

41 Now I say unto you, If this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you?

42 And now, when the people had heard these words, they clapped their hands for joy and exclaimed, This is the desire of our hearts.

The Gospel message is an invitation to have joy. To the people Alma baptized this decision to follow the Lord was not a burden at all, but an opportunity to join the Lord in a kind of life that was and is worth living.

Being a disciple of Christ is not always easy. There are things that tear at us daily to dissuade us from being Christ-like. We are pulled by responsibilities to those around us and by those things of the world that claim to and demand our attention. And we do have responsibilities, but what makes one person a disciple of Jesus or not is the priority we place upon each of these things in our lives.

As with most things, what defines us as individuals and as a people are not the things that happen to us, but the choices we make. Not every decision we make is a life-or-death decision, but they may very well be impactful nonetheless, whether in our life or in the lives of others. Jesus definitely wants you to choose his path, but he wants you to be well-informed before you embark on it. His path has “disciple” marked above it, and it is narrow enough to not accept error, but wide enough to be filled with love. It’s a path that leads to the tree of life, where Jesus has prepared a place for you.

1 There's an old, old path
where the sun shines through
life's dark storm clouds
from its home of blue,

in this old, old path made strangely sweet
by the touch divine of his blessed feet.

2 Find the old, old path;
'twill be ever new,
for the Savior walks
all the way with you,

in this old, old path made strangely sweet
by the touch divine of his blessed feet.

3 In this old, old path,
are my friends most dear,
and I walk with them,
with the angels near,

in this old, old path made strangely sweet
by the touch divine of his blessed feet.

4 'Tis an old, old path,
shadowed vales between,
yet I fearless walk
with the Nazarene,

in this old, old path made strangely sweet
by the touch divine of his blessed feet.

Lyrics by Vida E. Smith